

Ready, Set Report: You have to leave the past behind

By Jasen Obermeyer

?Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.?

? George Orwell, 1984

The past is a very interesting, fragile concept.

The quote I stated from 1984 is one of the book's most recognizable. Orwell is warning that whatever current government or society is in control, they have the power to change the present through changing the past, and by doing so, can shape the future.

In 1984's case, Big Brother and the Party constantly rewrite history, painting the former government they overthrew as a tyrannical one, its citizens enslaved. However, Big Brother created that system, but by constantly fixing the past to keep within the Party's line, it becomes a lie.

What's interesting about 1984 is that even though it was written in the 1940s, it's still relatable today. The past can be taught in various forms, various subjects, all with a meaning to it.

But it seems today that the past must be ignored.

Last summer there was rioting in the Southern States, with Confederate statues being torn down, because they symbolized slavery.

Again last year, the Durham District School Board announced that it is giving high school students the option of reading the book, other places in the States banning it because it's racist and ?makes some students feel uncomfortable.?

Removing these won't change the past. How does it make things better?

The best way to deal with a problem is to confront it. Don't go around it, or avoid it altogether.

Yes, the past has been a horrific place; filled with wars, genocides, violence and racism that can never be fully taught in the length of a school semester. But changing the past doesn't really do anything, and surely nothing good.

It seems by trying to change the racist, horrific parts of the past it will better the future. I can only see a future that is still violent, if not more violent than before.

How does pretending there isn't racism mean the future society will be equal and just?

If we fall and pretend that nothing happened, we'll keep falling. If we fall and learn to pick ourselves up, we won't fall again.

Ignoring the past doesn't better our society. We need to know where we came from, how we got to this point. If there is no past, there's no future because we'll be stuck in the same place.

Heck, let's just pretend there's been no United States since 1776. After all, the States has been a place of racism, slavery, civil war, and native massacres, and we shouldn't learn about that. But we should! If we do, we can learn from our mistakes, right our wrongs, and change our society today to make it better tomorrow.

Sometimes though, confronting the past isn't always the best thing, as with Justin Trudeau.

It seems our Prime Minister apologizes for anything and everything negative that has happened in the past. Recently, Conservative MP Marilyn Gladu criticized his recent apology for Canada turning away Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust in 1939.

This triggered her to say that apologizing constantly for what happened in the past "makes it less special," and questions how sincere he really is.

Rhoda Howard-Hassmann, a professor of political science at Wilfrid Laurier University said that Canada seems to be the "apology capital of the world," and that's not far off. Canadian seems to be known for being nice and saying sorry all the time, but now it's a stereotype.

Saying sorry for everything that Canada did wrong is not going to make that meaningful of a difference. Recognizing it, understanding the problem and finding the solution will make the future better. Actions speak louder than words.

Mr. Trudeau seems to have the right intentions, just not the proper execution. Ignoring the past doesn't help anyone, changing it is not possible. I thought today's society was more open and willing to change.

History needs to be taught correctly, even if it's ugly. The past is a delicate concept, one that can't be taken lightly as in Mr. Trudeau's case, but can't be ignored.

What sort of future society will we create? One that is racist and violent because it doesn't understand and know what those concepts are? One that looks to fix itself but doesn't change?

Hopefully, it's one of growth and maturity, one of true equality and peace, that can only be done through accepting and learning our past mistakes. If we keep changing the past, what sort of future is there?